

BAMIYAN BUDDHAS

SENSELESS DESTRUCTION

BY TALIBAN



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PREFACE

Buddhism was a living religion in Afghanistan for about 1200 years, from the 3rd century BC to 9th century AD, and it played a major role in the life and culture of the Afghan people during that period. The two giant Buddhas were carved on the cliff of a mountain at Bamiyan over 1500 years ago by the devout Buddhists of Afghanistan. After the advent of Islam in Afghanistan towards the end of the 9th century AD, the Buddhist shrines in Bamiyan were deserted by the Buddhists and decayed in the following centuries. But the Bamiyan Buddhas survived the vagaries of man and nature for over 1000 years during the Muslim rule. Significantly enough, the Bamiyan Buddhas were also repaired and restored in the 1970's by the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) at the instance of the then Government of Afghanistan. Commenting on the restoration work undertaken by UNESCO, Derk Kinnane observed in 1972 in an article titled 'Smiling Giant of Bamiyan':

"Today there is no danger from man's violence to these monuments. But there is menace that natural processes could seriously damage, or even obliterate them."

in Afghanistan. Consequently, the Bamiyan Buddhas and all other Buddha statues in Afghanistan have since been destroyed by Taliban despite protests and appeals from all over the world. How sad it is that as a result of the madness of Taliban the Smiling Giant of Bamiyan has been reduced to rubble. Verily, a great cultural heritage of humanity has been lost.

Divided into seven chapters, this book presents in brief the history of the Bamiyan Buddhas and their senseless destruction by the Taliban, and world's reaction thereto. The first two chapters — Heritage of Buddhism in Afghanistan and Bamiyan Buddhas in 630 AD have been penned by me. The next two chapters titled 'Bamiyan: Where Once Buddha's Golden Lines Sparked' by Dr. Mohan Lal Sharma (1970) and 'Smiling Giant of Bamiyan' by Derk Kinnane (1973) have been taken from THE MAHA BODHI journal, published by the Maha Bodhi Society of India, Calcutta, and the fifth chapter titled 'Vandals From The Dark Ages: Understanding The Taliban' by V. Sudarshan is reproduced from The Weekly Magazine, OUTLOOK, New Delhi, March 19,2001. The last two chapters are based on the news and views as reported in The Times Of India, New Delhi, from 28 February 2001 to 15 March 2001, the period during which the historic Bamiyan Buddhas were destroyed by the Forces of Darkness.

CHAPTER I

BUDDHIST HERITAGE IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is situated on the North-West of India and Pakistan, beyond Peshawar. Over 2300 years ago Afghanistan was a melting pot of Greek, Persian, Indian and Central Asian cultures. The first Indian King to rule over Afghanistan was Chandragupta Maurya (324 BC - 300 BC) who defeated Seleukos (Alexander's general) and annexed it to the vast Mauryan Empire. Bindusara, Chandragupta's son, ruled Afghanistan for nearly 27 years, from 300 BC - 273 BC. Bindusara was succeeded by Asoka the Great (273 BC - 232 BC), who, after the Kalinga war, embraced Buddhism, and launched a vigorous campaign to preach and propagate the sublime teachings of love and compassion of the Buddha in various parts of India and the neighbouring countries. It was during the reign of Asoka that Buddhism was introduced into Afghanistan, and soon got roots there, particularly in the Yona country where the Greeks had settled. As we know, Asoka had supplemented the preachings by the missionaries by engraving Dhamma Edicts on rocks and pillars in various parts of the Mauryan Empire. "It is significant to note", as says¹ Dr. C.S. Unnasak, "that as many as three inscriptions of Asoka have been

Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul. It is engraved on a rectangular piece of porous limestone block. It contains the text of the end of Rock Edict XII and the beginning of Rock Edict XIII; and so, it may be regarded as a part of a large slab which once contained all the Fourteen Rock Edicts of Asoka, as found elsewhere at several places. We may hope to discover other portions of it from Kandahar. The third inscription of Asoka is also fragmentary one, written in Aramaic script on a stone block. It was bought in the bazar of Kandahar and its find-spot is unknown (now in an Italian collection) and contains only seven lines, a part of the Pillar Edict-VII in a mixed Aramaic and Prakrit languages."


When the Mauryan Empire disintegrated in about 184 BC, parts of Afghanistan were re-occupied by Indo-Bactrians. Buddhism in Afghanistan got a great impetus during the reign of Kanishka of the Kushana dynasty who ruled from 78 AD - 101 AD, and whose empire extended from Kandahar to Varansi. It is presumed that the cave-monasteries started coming up in Bamiyan during the reign of Kanishka, and the small Buddha statue (35 metres high) was carved either during his reign or immediately thereafter in the 2nd century AD. Towards the middle of the 3rd century AD, Iran's fire worshipping

princes were converted to Islam. Under pressure, the Buddhist community of Bamiyan also converted to Islam. And the Buddhist relics were deserted and left uncared. Not only that, they came under attack also by the conquerors. In about 870 AD Yakub-bin-Laith destroyed many Buddha statues in Bamiyan, and possibly plucked the precious stones off the two giant Buddhas. Then Bamiyan was mercilessly revaged by Chengez Khan in the 13th century. But the great Buddhas survived the ravages of weather and man for more than 1000 years under Muslim rule.

Fa-hian, the first Chinese pilgrim, who came to India via Afghanistan at the beginning of the 5th century AD saw in Afghanistan a large number of Buddhist monasteries with about 3000 Buddhist monks. And Hiuen Tsang (Yuan Chwang), the second Chinese pilgrim, who came to India 230 years after Fa-hian in 630 AD found Buddhism even more flourishing in Afghanistan. In Bamiyan, he found ten monasteries with several thousand resident monks. He also saw two giant Buddhas carved out of a sandstone cliff of a mountain in the area. In Kapisa, Hiuen Tsang saw 100 monasteries with about 6000 monks. Similarly, he also saw a large number of Buddhist monks and monasteries in other parts of Afghanistan. After the advent of Islam

GHAZNI : Asoka is said to have built here 10 stupas. It has a Buddhist complex at Hunao Qala.

HADDA : Many sacred Buddhist spots dating from the 2nd to 7th century AD are found here.

BALKH  Ruins of many Buddhist shrines built during the reign of the Kushans in the 2nd century AD.

SURKH KOTAL : Site of a great temple built by Kanishka. Two km away is an important Buddhist site, dating to the 4th century AD, locally known as Takhat-e-Rustam (Rustam's Throne). A stupa cave crowns the hill which houses a monastery.

Verily, Afghanistan has glorious Buddhist heritage which is now under threat at the hands of Taliban.



CHAPTER II

BAMIYAN BUDDHAS

AS SEEN BY HIUEN TSANG IN 630 AD

Bamiyan lies to the north of Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan. Being on the Silk Route, the great trade route that linked in ancient days India, Central Asia and China, Bamiyan was for more than 1000 years an important centre of trade and commerce. It was also a great seat of Buddhist culture and learning, studded with Buddhist caves and temples. The two colossal Buddha statues, one 35 metres high and the other 55 metres high, are said to have been carved by the devout Buddhists of Afghanistan in the second century AD and the fifth century AD respectively. The first eye-witness account of their grandeur and glory has been recorded for us by Hiuen Tsang (Yuan Chwang), the celebrated Chinese pilgrim, who came to India in the seventh century AD in search of true Dhamma.

Hiuen Tsang was a very keen observer and has left for us the most valuable record of Central Asia and India in general and of Buddhism, the religion which he loved, in particular. Hiuen Tsang left China in 629 AD, at the age of 26, and took the same route to India.

The people inhabit towns either in the mountains or the valleys, according to circumstances. The capital leans on a steep hill, bordering on a valley 6 or 7 li in length. On the north it is backed by high precipices. It (*The country*) produces spring-wheat and few flowers or fruits. It is suitable for cattle, and affords pasture for many sheep and horses. The climate is wintry, and the manners of the people hard and uncultivated. The clothes are chiefly made of skin and wool, which are the most suitable for the country. The literature, customary rules, and money used in commerce are the same as those of the Tukhara country. Their language is a little different, but in point of personal appearance they closely resemble each other. These people are remarkable, among all their neighbours, for a love of religion (*a heart of pure faith*); from the highest form of worship to the three jewels, down to the worship of the hundred (*i.e., different*) spirits, there is not the least absence (*decrease*) of earnestness and the utmost devotion of heart. The merchants, in arranging their prices as they come and go, fall in with the signs afforded by the spirits. If good, they act accordingly; if evil, they seek to propitiate the powers. There are ten convents and about 1000 priests. They belong to the Little Vehicle, and the school of the Lokottaravadins.

his own body; then his ministers and the lower order of officers prevail on the priests to barter back these possessions; and in these matters most of their time is taken up.

To the south-west of the convent of the sleeping figure (*of Buddha*), going 200 li or so, passing the great Snowy Mountains on the east, there is a little watercourse (*valley*), which is moist with (*the overflowings of*) standing springs, bright as mirrors; the herbage here is green and bright. There is a *sangharama* here with a tooth of Buddha, also the tooth of a Pratyeka Buddha,⁴ who lived at the beginning of the *Kalpa*, which is in length about five inches, and in breadth somewhat less than four inches. Again, there is the tooth of a goldenwheel king,⁵ in length three inches, and in surface (*breadth*) two inches. There is also the iron begging-dish of Sanakavasa,⁶ a great Arhat, which is capable of holding eight or nine *shing* (*pints*). These three sacred objects, bequeathed by the holy personages referred to, are all contained in a yellow-golden sealed case. Again, there is here the *Sanghati* robe, in nine pieces of Sanakavasa; the colour is a deep red (*rose-red*); it is made of the bark (*peel*) of the *She-no-kia* plant. Sanakavasa was the disciple of Ananda.⁷

Going eastward from this, we enter the defiles of the Snowy

Muhammadan pir (see also *ib.*, p. 338). Hyder, quoting *Masalik Mamalik* and the *Farhang-i-Jahangiri* of Ibn Fakred-din Angju, says the two larger statues are 50 cubits high, one called *Surkh-but* (red image) and the other *khink-but* (grey image), and at some distance is a smaller one "in formae vetulae," called *Ncsr*. The *Ain-i-Akbari* says the larger of the two is 80 ells (cubits?)- and the lesser 50 in height; Burnes's estimate is 120 and 70 feet. Wilford gives a tolerably minute account of Bamiyan and these figures. Masson mentions five statues.

3. The *Mohsha Mahaparishad*; a meeting, as it seems, held every five years for the benefit of the priests (Buddhist community). On these occasions there were recitations of the law, and offerings were made to the priesthood. These assemblies were generally made on some favourite mountain. It was also called *Panchavarshika parishad*. See *Abstract of Four Lectures*, p. 170.
4. A Pratyeka Buddha is one who has attained enlightenment, that is, become a Buddha, but for himself alone.
5. That is, a monarch of the four dvipas or *suvarnachakravartin*.
6. Sanakavasa, or Sanavasika, according to some Northern accounts, was the fourth patriarch or president of the Buddhist community (*Fo-sho-hing-tsan-king*, xiv.) Other authorities speak of him as the third patriarch. He lived 100 years after Buddha.
7. The ordinary succession of the patriarchs is, after Buddha, (1) Kasyapa, (2) Ananda, (3) Madhyantika, (4) Sanakavasa. The last named is sometimes identified with Yasa, the son of Kana, who was one of the chief leaders in

CHAPTER III

BAMIYAN : WHERE ONCE BUDDHA'S GOLDEN LINES SPARKED *

— DR. MOHAN LAL SHARMA

The Buddhist stupas and monasteries and the massive statues of Buddha carved out of rock at Bamiyan in the heart of Afghanistan are still the wonder of tourists and scholars from all parts of the world.

Situated in the mid-point of Asia and at the crossroads between the north and south, east and west, Afghanistan naturally became in bygone times the meeting ground of different peoples and of various civilizations—Aryan (Bactrian or Rigvedic), Achaemenian, Greek Kushan and Buddhist.

The result was the birth of a hybrid culture that found its expression in different schools of art, employing a technique unquestionably borrowed from foreigners, but modified and moulded according to local requirements.

Greek culture found its way into Bactrian art in the fourth century

like Asoka, embraced Buddhism and became an active and liberal patron of that religion which was fast becoming a great World Religion. During his long reign, which lasted probably from 78 to 101 A.D., Buddhist art and religion flourished throughout his far-flung empire.

The famous school of sculpture known as the Gandhara or Graeco-Buddhist School made great progress. The most important change of the new schools was the deification of the founder of Buddhism, whose image became the object of religious worship.

Buddhism was, in origin, not only a religion but a philosophy of life and a code of morals. The Buddha, the Enlightened One, was not only god-like but also an inspired and inspiring teacher, who preached "The middle path" between indulgence and asceticism, avoiding both the extremes of gross luxury and grim austerity. The path can be easily followed by those who cannot completely give up worldly pursuits.

In Afghanistan Buddhism absorbed many elements of foreign culture. The primitive Buddhism of the Hinayana, a southern school, which was a system of practical morals and a tender regard for the sanctity of all living creatures, underwent tremendous changes. Greek as well as other foreign influences stimulated mythology and imagery.

Kabul) was his summer residence, while Purushapura (Peshawar) was his winter headquarters. He adorned his capitals with magnificent buildings, stupas and monasteries.

In Peshawar, Kanishka is said to have built a beautiful Sangharama with a lofty stupa, about 150 feet in height, perhaps one of the most magnificent temples of the time. Innumerable monasteries were erected at Kapisa. One of these, Shalokia, was built by the Chinese princesses kept by Kanishka as hostages in his court.

The temple was in a fair state of preservation when Hiuen Tsang, the famous Chinese pilgrim, visited the country in the early part of the seventh Century A.D. He describes with great delight the wealth and splendour of these monasteries which dotted the whole country. The smaller statue at Bamiyan (35 metres in height), or at least the stupa at its feet (no longer in existence), which became the core of later Buddhist buildings in that famous valley, may be ascribed to the efforts of this great king.

Bamiyan in those days was a great seat of culture, similar to Nalanda, Ajanta, Ellora, and Odantapuri. Its remains, when properly unearthed and studied, might throw immense light on the development of Greco-Buddhist culture in the country and will undoubtedly solve

the right leads to Mazar-i-Sharif and Katghan, while the second to the left leads to Bamiyan.

The road to Bamiyan runs parallel to the river of the same name in the opposite direction and skirts a range of hills of different colours, red predominating. After six miles an old mud fort perched on a steep rock attracts the attention of the passer-by. This is the city of Zahak-i-Maran. A little further the valley widens and a city of caves appears.

This is the historic city of Bamiyan, now in ruins, lying at the foot of a reddish hill, some 9000 feet above sea-level. Bamiyan is indeed the dividing line between two massive mountain ranges—the Hindu Kush and the Koh-i-Baba.

The valley of Bamiyan, deep sunk in the great plateau, is between 8000 and 9000 feet above the sea. To the south lies the snowcapped array of Koh-i-Baba, running to 16,000 and 17,000 feet. Rocky and toothbreaking as may be most of the passes, they are all passable at certain times and seasons; but in the winter months they are closed by deep snow and fierce blizzards. The deep valleys traversing this storm-ridden plateau are often exceedingly beautiful and form a strange contrast to the dull and barren rocky ridges that appear on

i-Gulghola-the City of Uproars), which crowns an isolated rock in the middle of the valley.

Enormous figures of Buddha (53 and 35 metres high) with smaller ones in different directions are carved out of the sedimentary rocks on the sides of the Bamiyan gorge. Once coated with cement or plaster and possibly coloured and gilded; these images must have strongly appealed to the imagination of the weary pilgrims, who prostrated themselves at their feet. "THE GOLDEN LINES SPARK ON EVERY SIDE," says Huien Tsang, who saw them in the year 630 A.D., when he counted more than ten monasteries and a thousand monks in the valley of Bamiyan.

Of the two massive images, the smaller, over 100 feet in height, is the older. It seems that it was begun in the second century A.D., probably under the patronage of Kanishka. The bigger one of about 160 feet is of a later date, probably around the fourth or fifth century A.D.

The niches of the Buddha contain marred but withal beautiful frescoes, dating from about the same period. These are very interesting from the archaeological point of view, as they show an important stage in the long process that brought art of India to

Though now in ruins, Bamiyan is one of the curiosities of the world. It was a flourishing city when the Moslems came there, and it was a great seat of commerce and learning until the beginning of the thirteenth century. The early Moslem writers speak of it in glorious terms. Yaquibi, for instance, describes it in detail and speaks of the frescoes that adorned the niches and caves. The local people, he says, called the big statue the Red Buddha, while the smaller one was known as the Grey Buddha.

The city with all its inhabitants was swept off the face of the valley by Cenghiz Khan, the Mongol, early in the thirteenth century A.D. It is said that one of his grandsons, Mutugen, son of Jaghatai, was killed in action during the siege of Bamiyan. When the town surrendered after a long time, Cenghiz, in revenge, ordered that no living being, man or animal, was to be spared. The ruined town was then called Mao-Baligh, the bad town. Though no longer a great religious centre, Bamiyan is fast recovering glimpses of its past glory if only as a great, modern tourist resort thanks to the facilities made available by today's transport.

CHAPTER IV

SMILING GIANT OF BAMIIAN*

— *DERK KINNANE*

In a tranquil valley in the remote mountains of Afghanistan stands the world's largest statue, a representation of the Lord Buddha, 53 metres (173 feet) tall.

The smiling giant and the niche that shelters him are carved from the rock of a cliffside forming part of the southern slope of the Hindu Kush. On the same cliffside, 1,200 metres (4,000 feet) to the east, another, seated Buddha, 35 metres (120 feet) high, looks over the valley and town of Bamiiyan with its small farms and river. The ochre-coloured bluff, the dun earth and the rich greens of cultivated plots and rows of poplars are set off by a clear blue sky. During the main tourist season the weather is temperate and bracing the altitude being about 2,600 metres (8,500 feet).

Providing picturesque countryside with one of the world's most impressive artistic monuments, the valley of Bamiiyan is a place of serenity, where the pounding stress of modern urban and industrial life seems very distant. A place to draw tourists, certainly. And, well

The Afghan Government also has under study a plan not to limit the development of the site to the immediate area of the great statues. The plan would cover an area as far east as the 'Red Citadel', Shahr-i-Zohak, about 18 kms (11 miles) distant from the Buddhas and the modern town of Bamiyan which lies at their feet.

The ruins of the citadel of Shahr-i-Zohak and of Shahr-i-Gulgola, south of Bamiyan, are testimony of a time when the valley was far from peaceful. Bamiyan was once an important centre on the route between India, Central Asia and China in the east and Iran and the Greek, Roman and Byzantine world in the west. For over 1,000 years it flourished, a prize sought by a succession of conquerors. Then, in 1,222, Mutukin, a favourite grandson of the conqueror Cenghis Khan died in a battle for Bamiyan. When Cenghis succeeded in capturing it, he avenged Mutukin's death by ordering the annihilation of all living beings in the vicinity. Bamiyan was utterly destroyed. In time, new settlements arose, but the valley was never again a place of cultural and commercial importance.

Pilgrim recorded gold and jewels

Six centuries before the wrath of the Mongols was unleashed a scholarly pilgrim from China visited Bamiyan and wrote that the great

this religion. But the impetus to build the great monuments probably arose during or after the reign of Kanishka, the ruler who in the second century A.D. made his state, covering the northern part of the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan, for a while the most powerful realm in Central Asia. Kanishka, who belonged to the Kushans, a dynasty of Central Asian Oly was also the champion of Mahayana or Great wheel Buddhism and spent vast sums on devotional works.

The Kushan association with Bamiyan is suggested by the style of the statues of Buddha which reflect those of this dynasty's great art centre at Gandhara, in what is now the vale of Peshwar in northwestern Pakistan. The massive proportion of the larger Buddha, the right hand raised in the protective gesture abhaya mudra, and the stylized draping to represent his man's robe recall Gandharan art — an art which sought to synthesize Indian and Hellenistic influences. A curious technique used at Bamiyan was to make the folds in the Buddha's robe by hanging heavy ropes over the carved surface holding them in place with pegs, and then covering them with stucco.

Gazzola and Perrin find no influence of the art of Iran's Sassanid dynasty in the larger Buddha. But in the smaller one they detect the Sassanian style in the treatment of garments and ornaments. 'This

Larger Buddha Carved Last

On the whole, the caves closest to the smaller Buddha antedate those near the bigger one. Thus the 35 metre (120 foot) Buddha could have been begun around the 2nd century A.D. while the later works those near the 53 metre (173 foot) Buddha would belong to a more recent period of activity the 5th or perhaps 6th century, they report.

It was during the latter epoch that Hsuan Tsang paid his visit. In 630 the monk had seen Bamiyan and was travelling eastward across India before eventually going back to China. In 632 far to the west in the desert city of Medina, the Prophet Muhammad died, having established the authority of Islam in Arabia and prepared the way for the whirlwind of Muslim expansion that followed. About the time that Hsuan Tsang finally returned home in 645 the first Arab armies were penetrating Afghanistan.

The advance of Islam was slower in the Hindu Kush than in neighbouring regions, but in the century following Hsuan Tsang's visit Muslim Princes ruled in Bamiyan. For a while Buddhism continued to have its followers and there were still Buddhist devotional statues to be carried off — which was done by Yakub ibn Laith, a ruler belonging

cliffside. Indeed, although the side has kept more or less the same appearance it had when the statues were carved, it has in fact moved back a considerable distance. Trickling water created fissure that eventually spread and joined with geological cracks isolating parts of the rockface on its other three sides. Sooner or later, this free-standing rock crumbled.

Gazzola and Perrin recommended that a careful study be made of how to go about strengthening the cliffside.

Sometime around 1940 a brick buttress was erected against the rockface just to the west of the smaller Buddha to prevent the collapse of a 1,000 cubic metres of the cliffside as a result of a fissure that had already wrecked one of the stairways linking cave sanctuaries. Unfortunately, the buttress has not worked. The fissure is getting larger and the buttress itself has developed a crack.

Grave problems also beset the conservation of the larger Buddha and a team of Indian experts, at the invitation of the Afghan government, are working on reinforcing the two statues and on their artistic restoration.

Summing up, the UNESCO experts urge that first of all a team

one, linking Kabul and Bamiyan. If possible, the road should continue to the beautiful lakes of Band-i-Amir not far from the valley.

Gazzola and Perrin firmly urge that the agricultural economy in the valley be maintained, protected and aided. It is only through the farming activities of the local people that Bamiyan can remain a living place and not turn into a lifeless open-air museum.

While a market and a school, like the old hotel, should be pulled down because they are eyesores. These facilities should also be replaced. 'It is a question of making Bamiyan live better by keeping its general aspect and maintaining economic activity based on, agriculture and commerce while complementing this with a modern activity : tourism, they say.

'Afghanistan has the rare possibility of reconciling the demands of tourism development highly important to its economy, and at the same time exploiting exceptional natural and cultural endowments, the UNESCO experts declare. — (UNESCO Features).

CHAPTER V

VANDALS FROM THE DARK AGES

UNDERSTANDING THE TALIBAN

— V. SUDARSHAN

It was in September 1996 that the world first caught a glimpse of the Taliban's lust for blood and vengeance. Kabul had fallen and the Taliban had vanquished the (anti-Soviet) mujahideen. Marauding bands of gun-totting youth took over the presidential palace and beat the former communist President Najibullah, then under house arrest, senseless. They then castrated him and tied his bleeding body to the jeep before driving the vehicle several times around the palace compound. Najib was then shot dead. They meted the same treatment to his brother. But their rancour still didn't subside. They hung the two bodies from a concrete traffic control post outside the palace, located near the UN headquarters there.

The following day, a stunned world saw pictures of the two bodies hanging with steel wire nooses, unlit cigarettes dangling from their lips. The message was clear: a virulent strain of Islam was about to sweep through Afghanistan.

The Taliban's advent to power began when it replaced the mujhahideen who had been propped up by Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), the Saudis and the Americans to fight the Soviet-backed Kabul regime of Najibullah. In fact, in March 1987, after the mujhahideen, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, launched their attack on Tajikistan, the then CIA director, William Casey, made a secret trip to Pakistan to review the operation.

Nine years later, however, the mujahideen warlords were a corrupt, squabbling lot. It was into this ideological vacuum that Mullah Omar made his entry, and his band of followers started an Islamic 'reform' movement. This came to be known as the Taliban, or students (of Islam) who formed the core group of Mullah Omar. Drawn largely from Afghan refugees who had fled their country following the Soviet invasion and Pakistani impoverished classes, they were young men who had studied in madrassas dotting the Pakistan-Afghan border. These seminaries taught an obscurantist version of Islam drawn from the orthodox Wahabi school. For them, jihad was an instrument of political and social change.

In 1996, Mullah Omar was anointed by his fellow Taliban travellers as Amir-ul-Momineen (leader of the faithful). He had started off as

brick wall. Then a Taliban tank toppled the wall, burying the men alive. It was innovative, effective, and most importantly, spectator-friendly. Later *Anis*, the Taliban newspaper, wrote that Mullah Omar "attended the function to give Sharia punishment to the three buggers. . ."

It was Omar who ordered the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. His word is law in Afghanistan. As Wakil Ahmed (one-time food-taster, driver, personal attendant and spokesman of Mullah Omar) told an Arabic magazine *Al-Majallah* in 1996: "Decisions are based on the advice of the Amir-ul-Momineen. For us consultation is not necessary. We believe that this is in line with the Sharia. We abide by the Amir's view. Even if he alone takes this view. . ."

Little is known about Mullah Omar. He is a Pashtun born circa 1959 at Nodeh village near Kandahar. After his father died, he moved to Singesar village in Mewand district of Kandahar and started a small madrassa. He fought against Najibullah between 1989 and 1992, and was wounded four times. Omar has three wives, the second one a teenager whom he married in 1995. His five children study in the madrassa he started and his family lives in Singesar. He is well-built and wears a black turban and beard. These details are

equipment such as tanks and heavy artillery, repairs and maintenance of Taliban's air force and airport, road-building, electricity supply in Kandahar and salaries. Officially, Pakistan denied it was supporting the Taliban." The US, on the other hand, winked at the Taliban all through their Kandahar-Kabul sojourn, till various women's groups made it impossible for the Clinton administration to politically flirt with and then embrace Mullah Omar.

The Taliban leadership is a disabled lot. Omar himself is blind in the right eye. He lost it in 1989 when a Russian rocket exploded close to him. Again, the governor of Kandahar, Mullah Mohammed Hassan, a founder member of the Taliban, has a peg leg and the tip of one of his fingers is missing, lost to shrapnel wound. Justice minister Nuruddin Turabi and former foreign minister Mohammed Ghaus are both reportedly one-eyed wonders as well. Kabul mayor Abdul Majid doesn't have one leg and two fingers. And they seem to lead by example. According to 1998 figures, the number of families headed by a disabled person was 63,000. Under the Taliban the only productive industry relates to factories making artificial limbs, crutches and allied products.

But such disabilities have only hardened the Taliban leaders. In a system of instant corrective measures the Taliban's cures are

There is scarcely anything that is not proscribed under the Taliban. TV is banned, as is smoking, movies, wedding parties, any sort of mixed-sex gathering, cameras, photographs, children's toys, kites, dolls, employment for women, any kind of make-up jewellery, plucking of eyebrows, white socks (for some strange reason the Taliban have decreed white socks to be sexually arousing), high-heeled shoes and laughing loudly. There can be no pictures or portraits hung at home. When the Associated Press reported in 1996 that music is banned, it quoted education minister Mullah Abdul Hanifi saying it was "because it (music) creates a strain in the mind and hampers the study of Islam". Education for girls is also banned. Tailors are banned from measuring women for clothes. Women cannot go outside without a burqa and even then must be accompanied by a male relative. Commentators have wryly noted that it is probably simpler to enumerate the things Taliban have not banned than to make an exhaustive list of banned substances, which, for some reason, includes paper bags, too.

To put it simply, under the Taliban, culture is banned. Celebration of the Afghan spring festival, Navroz, is proscribed. It used to mark the first day of the Persian solar calendar (pre-Islamic and Zoroastrian

The Taliban now mans everything. There is an irony here. The word Talib means student; taliban is its plural. Although schooling is not banned, at least for the boys, the schools are all shut. By December 1998 the UNICEF reported that the country's educational system had collapsed. In its assessment, nine in every 10 girls and two out of every three boys had not enrolled in school.

This is partly because of the Taliban leaders, most of whom hail from poor provinces which had no schools. This is true of Mullah Omar too. With no teaching going on, these student-followers of Mullah Omar are running amok amputating, beheading, stoning to death, whipping, enforcing the Sharia as they see it. Most Muslim countries are mute witnesses but they aren't tacit supporters either. The Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), for instance, has not recognised the Taliban regime.

After the Taliban took over Kabul in 1996, its Olympic-size stadium reports full house regularly. But it is not for witnessing sporting events. The assembled spectators at the Kabul stadium witness amputations, stoning to death of women found guilty of adultery, summary executions and the like, not games. The Taliban expect the Afghans to watch and learn a lesson or two about the kind of Islam

CHAPTER VI

DESTRUCTION OF BAMIIYAN BUDDHAS ,: BLOW BY BLOW ACCOUNT

The Times of India, New Delhi

(28.2.20001 - 15.3.2001)

1. 28.2.2001 Taliban decree may wipe out parts of Indian history
2. 1.3.2001 Taliban to destroy Buddhas despite outcry
3. 2.3.2001 Taliban begins demolition
4. 3.3.2001 Buddhas being bombarded
5. 4.3.2001 Buddhas begin to crumble
6. 5.3.2001 It's all over for Bamiyan Buddhas
7. 6.3.2001 Isolation frustrates Taliban
8. 7.3.2001 Despite Eid - Taliban dyanmite Buddhas
9. 8.3.2001 UNSC slams Buddha destruction: Lanka offers cash

February 28, 2001

TALIBAN DECREE MAY WIPE OUT PARTS OF INDIAN HISTORY

By Maneesh Pandey

New Delhi: The decree issued Monday by the ruling Taliban militia supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar ordering the destruction of all statues in Afghanistan, which the Taliban view as un-Islamic, has shocked the conservationists worldwide.

Afghanistan was a centre of learning and trade before Islamic conquerors invaded it. In terms of heritage, it is famous for two massive Buddha statues (55 metres and 35 metres) in the central province of Bamiyan.

They are believed to be among the tallest "Standing Buddhas" in the world. Besides, the region is home to six bilingual Ashokan rock edicts, Buddhist viharas, stupas and remains of the Kushana period.

But all these will cease to exist, if the Taliban goes ahead with its plans. The decree would leave nothing, but only debris of a bygone era, feel experts.

For India, the region is of great significance, as it till date houses

Asia with the sub-continent. "Being a convenient halting place for trading caravans, and monastic establishments and Buddhist images spread all around, it soon turned out to be a major Buddhist centre of meditation and worship and continued to be so until Chengis Khan's invasion in 13th century," says Sengupta.

Jalalabad, bordering Pakistan and now a strategic battlefield of the Taliban and opposition Northern Alliance, was once a famous Buddhist pilgrimage site. Similarly, Hadda (ancient name Ningrahar) was famous for stupas, viharas and Buddhist sacred objects.

The place is mentioned in the vivid accounts of Chinese traveller Hiuen-Tsang. Another important site was Begram (ancient name Kapisa).

Once the summer capital of Kushana, the site unearthed thousands of objects of ivory and coins belonging to the Kushana period.

The Kabul Museum, which was once adorned with smaller Buddhist figures, priceless statues, records and artefacts and was a much sought-after centre for research among archaeologists, is reportedly non-existent today.

leadership from its Islamic mission, the foreign minister said Wednesday.

Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel said Taliban supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar's decision to destroy pre-Islamic statues in Afghanistan, including the world's tallest Buddha, was irreversible.

The US State Department and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan are the latest to add their voices to the chorus of condemnation of Omar's decree, which was announced Monday night.

"You who have lived in Afghanistan and have experience — have you ever seen any decision of the Islamic Emirate (Taliban) reversed?" Mutawakel asked.

Omar ordered the total destruction of all statues throughout Afghanistan, once a key stop on the ancient Silk Road and melting pot of Eastern and Western cultures, in line with a fatwa from local Islamic clerics. The most famous of Afghanistan's statues are two ancient Buddhas carved into a sandstone mountain in central Bamiyan province.

Almost 2,000 years old, the largest of the two is the biggest standing Buddha in the world at 50 meters. The figures, the landlocked

US State Department spokesman Philip Reeker said the Taliban's order "directly contradicts one of Islam's basic tenets — tolerance for other religions."

"The US is distressed and baffled by this announcement by the Taliban," he said.

Annan appealed to the Taliban not to carry out its edict, saying the UN General Assembly "has repeatedly called on all Afghan parties to protect the cultural and historic relics and monuments of Afghanistan, which are part of the common heritage of mankind."

Annan appealed to the Taliban leadership "to abide by their previous commitments to protect Afghanistan's cultural heritage in general, and the two great Buddhist sculptures in Bamiyan in particular," his spokesman said.

Buddhists in Japan and Thailand have also called on the Taliban to rethink the decision. Sri Lanka launched a major diplomatic offensive to save the historic Buddha statues. Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar asked his envoys in India, Thailand, Myanmar and Nepal to have urgent consultations to work out a common international strategy to deal with the threat, a statement said.

March 2, 2001

TALIBAN BEGINS DEMOLITION

KABUL: Ignoring an international outcry, Afghanistan's puritanical Taliban Islamic militia began demolishing statues across the country Thursday, including two towering ancient stone Buddhas.

Afghanistan Radio quoted Taliban Information Minister Qudratullah Jamal stating the Taliban had started destroying statues in Kandahar, Bamiyan, Herat and Kabul Museum, following a fresh decree from its Chief Mullah Omar. "We will use all means, including cannons and tanks to destroy the statues," he said. Jamal said the destruction of scores of pre-Islamic figures was designed to stop the worshipping of "false idols," throughout the country.

He said militiamen started wrecking the almost 2,000-year-old Buddhist masterpieces in the central province of Bamiyan, including the world's tallest standing Buddha measuring 50 metres, after sunrise. The Taliban soldiers were also at "work" in the Kabul museum and elsewhere in the provinces of Ghazni, Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar.

The decree for the destruction of statues was issued after consultation with religious leaders and the Taliban Islamic Supreme

to a UNESCO-sponsored meeting in Paris to discuss the destruction of the Buddhist statues.

Koichiro Matsuura, chief of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), said their destruction would be a "real cultural disaster that will cause an irreparable harm to a heritage of exceptional universal value."

But Afghanistan's foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel said the edict was irreversible. "Have you ever seen any decision of the Islamic Emirate (Taliban) reversed?" Mutawakel asked.

Afghans, baffled at first by the decree and now its implementation, quietly and sadly condemned the destruction. "Destroyed cities can be rehabilitated. But once the statues are gone, they can never be replaced," said a resident of Kabul.

March 3, 2001

BUDDHAS BEING BOMBARDED

KABUL: Afghanistan's ancient Buddha statues in central Bamiyan province came under a barrage of rocket and tank fire from the ruling Taliban militia on Friday as the world watched in horror.

UN special mission to Afghanistan Francesc Vendrell discussed the Taliban's edict calling for the destruction of all pre-Islamic statues and shrines with the militia's foreign minister. Wakil Mohammad Muttawakil. "But he (Vendrell) did not get any positive response," a UN spokesman said.

Even the Taliban's closest ally, Pakistan pleaded for the preservation of the ancient works of art. Thailand suggested that an international organization cut a deal with the Taliban to buy ancient statues targeted for destruction. "Why doesn't UNESCO or an organization interested in antiquity make an offer to the Taliban," said Thai foreign ministry spokesman Pradap Pibulsonggram. The Thai government has also put its weight behind a Paris-based Buddhist organization that has called for a halt to the destruction. Other Thai Buddhist groups have also expressed their sorrow.

Japan added its voice Friday. "The Japanese government is deeply concerned," said Kauhiko Koshikawa, spokesman for Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori. "Those statues are assets to all human beings."

UN secretary-general Kofi Annan and the Italy-funded Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage have called for the preservation of the statues. And French President Jacques Chirac

"Our soldiers are working hard. The Bamiyan Buddhas will come down soon. We are using everything at our disposal to destroy them." Carved in the third and fifth centuries, the two statues are relics of Afghanistan's pre-Islamic past. Both the statues were damaged by artillery fire during Afghanistan's civil war.

Jamal did not have details about which statue was targeted first and whether the heads of both statues had been removed or of only one. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York offered to preserve the statues. The Taliban have not responded to that offer. Also on Saturday, a special envoy of UNESCO met Abdul Salam Zaeef, the Taliban's ambassador in neighbouring Pakistan, to register the world's outrage over the destruction.

Pierre La France, special representative of the UNESCO, said the destruction of the statues would only worsen the Taliban's already troubled relations with the world community. But Zaeef said there was no reversing the order, "It's a decree by the ulema (clerics) and the government can't stop its implementation," Zaeef said.

The Taliban was unmoved by international appeals to save the statues as historical artifacts. Some Islamic countries have termed the Taliban order to destroy the historical relics as embarrassing for

said such statues, like Egypt's Pharaonic monuments, bolstered the economies of Islamic countries through tourism.

March 5, 2001

IT'S ALL OVER FOR BAMIIAN BUDDHAS

KABUL : Taliban officials said Sunday that Afghanistan's ancient Bamiyan Buddhas were nearly destroyed and ruled out any hope for their preservation, ignoring pleas of the UNESCO special envoy Pierre Lafrance.

Foreign minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil said he had detailed discussions with Lafrance in Kandahar but could see no reason to stop the destruction, the Afghan Islamic Press reported.

"The edict will be implemented *Inshallah* (God willing):. Mutawakil said. He rejected offers from several countries as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. "why should we give them to anyone? They are against our beliefs. We have museums here and we will keep our cultural and historical artifacts there," he said.

Minister of information and culture Mawalawi Qudratullah Jamal said the destruction of "un-Islamic" ancient statues was continuing

Journalists have been barred from visiting the Kabul Museum and the Bamiyan province where the Taliban have recently engaged in heavy battles with armed opposition forces.

The Islamic militia last week began smashing statues around the country to prevent idolatry, but Lafrance said Saturday there was a "faint glimpse of hope" they could still be saved. He cited conflicting reports from Taliban officials about the extent of the destruction so far. The Group of Eight and the European Union expressed "dismay and shock" at the destruction and urged Afghan leaders not to implement "this deeply tragic decision."

Jamal said that while the action against the statues had nothing to do with the regime's craving for international recognition, the UN would have more influence in Kandahar if it did not still recognise the ousted government. "We tell the UN to go and ask (ousted president Burhanuddin Rabbani) for the statues' preservation, because they recognize him," he said.

Lafrance, the former French ambassador to Iran and Pakistan, on Saturday met the Taliban ambassador in Islamabad and expressed the world's outrage.

president Burhanuddin Rabbani, which occupies Afghanistan's seat at the UN.

Taliban Minister of Information and Culture Mawlawi Qudratullah Jamal insisted Sunday that the destruction of the statues, including two centuries-old giant stone Buddhas in Bamiyan province, had nothing to do with the regime's craving for international recognition. But he indicated that the UN would have more influence with the Taliban, who control some 90 per cent of Afghan territory, if it did not continue to recognise the ousted Rabbani government.

Noting the international isolation of the Taliban, the foreign minister said pointedly: "We tell the UN to go and ask Rabbani for the statues' preservation because they recognize him." An Afghan intellectual close to the Taliban said the order to destroy the statues — which Taliban supreme leader Mulla Mohammad Omar had previously said would be protected — was the result of increasing frustration on the part of the regime.

March 7, 2001

DESPITE EID — TALIBAN DYNAMITE BUDDHAS

KABUL : Taliban officials said dynamite was being used against

"The statues will be destroyed in compliance with the order ... and so far there is no proposal under consideration." Zaeef said. Taliban officials have said militiamen have been attacking the colossal stone Buddhas with rockets, tanks, gunpowder and tools such as spades and hammers, although the extent of the damage is impossible to verify.

Observers have been refused permission to go to central Bamiyan province, where the two statues, including the largest standing Buddha in the world, were hewn into sandstone cliff more than 1,500 years ago. The Taliban militia, which rules most of Afghanistan under a puritanical version of Islamic law, last week ordered the annihilation of all statues to prevent idolatry, sparking an international outcry.

Ahmad Bahram, a spokesman for anti-Taliban opposition group Hezb-e-Wahdat, confirmed only that the Bamiyan Buddhas had been shelled. "We have heard that they have fired a few shells at the statues but they have not yet used dynamite," he said.

The US on Monday reiterated its appeal for the Taliban to leave the statues alone for future generations, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said. Contacts were made with the militia's

Diplomats in Pakistan have privately indicated they do not believe the destruction is as extensive as the Taliban have said, and a UNESCO special envoy late Monday insisted the Bamiyan Buddhas could still be saved. But Mulla Omar, in an Eid address Monday, defended his edict and said the destruction of "false idols" was a matter of pride for Afghans. Meanwhile at Phnom Penh, UNESCO official Lyndel Prott said the planned destruction of ancient Buddhist statues in Afghanistan show the international community must unite to protect the world's heritage.

March 8, 2001

UNSC SLAMS BUDDHA DESTRUCTION; LANKA OFFERS CASH

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council condemned the order by Afghanistan's ruling Taliban to destroy pre-Islamic relics as an "incomprehensible and wanton" act of violence against the country's cultural heritage.

Council members on Tuesday joined other UN bodies, governments, religious and cultural organizations in urging the Taliban to halt the destruction of an important part "of the world's cultural treasure."

the country as idolatrous will be carried out despite the international outcry.

The Security Council statement also expressed "grave concern" at the famine and continued suffering of the Afghan people, who are facing the worst drought in a generation. Council members deplored the civil war "and the absence of effective government that might address this humanitarian disaster."

Meanwhile in Colombo, Sri Lanka offered to finance if possible international operation to save the priceless Buddha statues threatened with destruction by the Taliban militia. President Chandrika Kumaratunga wrote to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan making the offer to join in any collective drive to save the statues, here secretary Kusumsiri Balapatabendi said.

He said the President noted that India had offered to provide shelter to the statues the Taliban wanted to destroy and the Sri Lankan government was fully supportive of India's position. UN special envoy to Afghanistan Pierre Lafrance believes there is little hope of persuading the Taliban militia to preserve the country's ancient statues, a report said Wednesday.

His statement came as Japan launched a new bid to save the statues and a day after a UNESCO envoy said the irreplaceable relics had not yet been badly damaged, holding out hope they may yet win a reprieve.

Muttawakil insisted that a decree by the Taliban's supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar ordering the total destruction of all statues in the country was "ir-reversible". "We have said that we would not spare pre-Islamic or post-Islamic Buddhist artefacts," the minister said from the militia's southern stronghold of Kandahar.

"The Emirate has been established for realization of Islamic Sharia (law). And we will implement the verdict. "The verdict refers to a ruling by a Taliban court following advice from Afghan Ulema, or religious scholars, on the issue.

Muttawakil again brushed aside the idea of building a concrete wall to conceal the Bamiyan Buddhas from view. "The verdict calls for their destruction," he said.

A three-member Japanese delegation arrived in Islamabad Thursday enroute to Afghanistan in the latest bid to persuade the Taliban not to demolish the statues in the central Afghan city of Bamiyan. UNESCO special envoy Diogo Leites said on Wednesday

save Buddhist statues in Afghanistan from destruction. Wickremanayaka said Germany was moving a resolution co-sponsored by Sri Lanka urging the UN General Assembly to save the statues. "We are inviting the international community to react to the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security," Wickremanayaka told Parliament. "If the Taliban does not want to retain these statues, Sri Lanka is willing to take them and preserve them for posterity." Wickremanayaka said he would join Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar in Pakistan on Saturday to try to save the statues held sacred by Sri Lankans, a majority of whom are Buddhists.

China joined Thursday the world in condemning the Taliban. "It is the shared responsibility of all countries in the world to preserve the cultural heritage," foreign ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao said.

March 10, 2001

PAKISTAN SENDING MINISTER TO AFGHANISTAN

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is sending a high-level delegation to Afghanistan for talks with Taliban chief Mulla Mohammad Omar in yet another attempt to stop the destruction of Buddhist statues, a foreign office spokesman said Friday.

successive appeals last week urged the Taliban militia not to destroy the historical artefacts.

The news of Haider's proposed visit comes a day after Pakistan leadership summoned Taliban ambassador to Islamabad, Mulla Abdul Salam Zaeef, to convey its displeasure over the destruction of the heritage monuments. Pakistan's attempts to mediate were seen here as an effort by Islamabad to deflect criticism that it had done little to prevail on Taliban despite repeated appeals from the world community.

Meanwhile, opposition sources said Friday that Taliban militia are blasting the Bamiyan Buddhas with tank shells and dynamite. Opposition sources based only 40 km west of the two ancient statues in central Bamiyan province said the Taliban had resumed the destruction following a break for a religious holiday.

"They were attacking both the statues with tank shells and were using dynamite," said Ahmad Bahram, a spokesman for Hezb-e-Wahdat, a Shiite opposition group which briefly captured Bamiyan last month. Three envoys were sent from the Japanese government Wednesday and are believed to be travelling by road from western Pakistan to the southern Taliban bastion of Kandahar Friday.

They are carrying a letter from Japanese Foreign Minister Yohei

central Afghanistan, international aid workers said Sunday, despite desperate pleas from abroad to spare the relics. Despite the international outcry, the Taliban appeared Sunday to have carried out their plan.

At a news conference in the Pakistani capital, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said the Taliban's Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil told him that "all the moveable statues have been destroyed" and that the giant mountain carvings of Buddha were being demolished.

And in an unprecedented gesture, Annan walked out from his meeting with Muttawakil after he failed to convince him. An international aid worker who attended the talks said earlier that Muttawakil had told Annan that nothing was left of statues. The destruction, however, has been corroborated by Taliban officials in southern Afghanistan and by an aid worker who said his information came from witnesses in the area. It has been impossible to independently verify the reports because the Taliban have refused to allow anyone in the Bamiyan Valley area, where the statues stood.

After meeting with Annan, the Taliban foreign minister was asked whether the demolition had been completed. "There might not be as

Saturday, Annan said he would convey the world's outrage at the destruction. By Sunday, it appeared to be too late.

"I walked away from our meeting not very encouraged," said Annan. Relations between the United Nations and the Taliban have never been good, and they have worsened with fresh sanctions imposed in January to press for the extradition of suspected terrorist Osama Bin Laden. The Taliban have refused to hand him over.

The Taliban's Radio Shariat on Saturday said there would be no change to the order. The statues violate the tenets of Islam as laid out in the *Quran*, the broadcast said.

Islamic nations also expressed their outrage at the destruction. Egypt sent its chief Muslim cleric Grand Mufti Nasr Farid Wasel to Afghanistan to appeal to the Taliban to change their order. On Sunday, a Taliban official in Pakistan who spoke on condition of anonymity said the Islamic world had simply waited too long.

March 14, 2001



LOBBIES OIC TO HALT FURTHER CARNAGE IN AFGHANISTAN

Meanwhile in Colombo, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremenayake headed for Pakistan on Tuesday to lobby Islamabad and pressure the Taliban to save the Bamiyan Buddhas. Officials here said the PM was undertaking the visit despite reports that the Taliban Islamic rulers in Afghanistan had destroyed the priceless statues.

Sri Lanka decided to send Wickremanayake to Pakistan, one of the three countries to recognise the Taliban administration, in the hope of saving the Bamiyan statues. Wickremanayake is due to hold talks with Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf.

Over the weekend, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar held talks with Musharraf and expressed Colombo's concerns for the Buddha statues.

March 15, 2001

BAMIYAN BUDDHAS LAID TO REST

By Siddharth Vardarajan

KABUL: Finally laying to rest any last glimmer of hope about the fate of the Bamiyan Buddhas, the Taliban on Wednesday said that

gave an assurance that this would not apply to statues which might be worshipped by Afghan's small Hindu and Sikh Communities inside their temples.

"Their statues will not be smashed as they are worshipping them as part of their religious rituals. Hindus and Sikhs can fulfil their religious worshipping without any concern," he added.

Muttawakil parried questions on how the Taliban would react if a country like Spain, where there are no Muslims, were to destroy ancient mosques in Cordoba and Granada.

"The Spanish law might not allow such destruction," he said. But what would happen if Spain were to change its laws, he was asked. Muttawakil finally admitted that "the situation will have to be judged then, but obviously we will be unhappy". Shifting ground, he then attacked the international community for focusing only on bad news from Afghanistan. Asked whether the destruction of the statues was good news or bad, he said: "It depends. For them it is bad, for us (it is) good."

CHAPTER VII

INDIA'S REACTION TO TALIBAN ACT

*As Reported by
The Times of India, New Delhi*

1. 28.2.2001 India condemns fatwa
2. 2.3.2001 'Cultural carnage' screams India
3. 3.3.2001 Restrain Taliban, PM urges world leaders
4. 3.3.2001 Parliament condemns attack
5. 3.3.2001 Heritage experts condemn Taliban
6. 3.3.2001 Faithless Vandalism
7. 4.3.2001 The Taliban is a state of mind, ours as much as theirs
8. 4.3.2001 A page of history has been torn
9. 4.3.2001 Dalai Lama regrets destruction
10. 5.3.2001 The Buddha Smiles

February 28, 2001

INDIA CONDEMNS FATWA

India Tuesday condemned the Taliban militia's decree ordering the destruction of all statues in Afghanistan, including the Bamiyan Buddhas and other relics, terming it as an assault on the common heritage of humankind.

In a strongly-worded statement here, the external affairs ministry said the decree, reportedly issued by Mullah Omar, leader of the Taliban militia, once again profiles the militia's "narrow and obscurantist ideologies".

It said, "We condemn this edict and call upon the Taliban to ensure that the Bamiyan Buddhas and other relics are fully protected.

"The Taliban edict constitutes an assault not only on the Afghan tradition but on the common heritage of humankind."

It noted that Afghanistan has through history stood at the crossroads of civilisations and it bears imprint in greater measure.

March 2, 2001

motive". He didn't elaborate it further but few others, requesting anonymity, were unanimous in saying that it might "spill over in our land" and Kashmir may be the new theatre. "It's extremely tragic" says S.K. Singh, India's ex-ambassador to Afghanistan. "The destruction of any global property is an issue of utmost concern. They have not only destroyed the world-famous heritage but shattered the sentiments of millions of Buddhist followers," he adds.

The sites targeted are Bamiyan, — home to the two "tallest standing Buddhas" and other Buddhist masterpieces — the Kabul museum, Ghazni, (from where a sculpture of *Mahisasura Mardini*, Goddess Durga slaying the demon buffalo, dating 7th and 8th century AD was unearthed), Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar.

The UNESCO office here has condemned it as an extremist act. Prithviraj Perera, director of culture in UNESCO, said the previous government had in fact proposed the Bamiyan Buddha statues for nomination as world heritage to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. This could be an act of vengeance too, he said. "The whole world will react with indignation but those who respect the dignity and rights of other cultures, will not react by similar destructions," said Perera.

and religious terrorism were not enough," he said. Slamming the Taliban for its fanaticism, he said : "Breaking of statues, hanging of women (reported last week), discriminating civilians on religious lines is not part of our (Afghan) culture. It belongs to some aliens who are claiming part of our land," says Khalil.

March 3, 2001

RESTRAIN TALIBAN, PM URGES WORLD LEADERS

NEW DELHI : Prime Minister Vajpayee has written to various world leaders, urging them to raise the collective voice of humanity to stop the senseless destruction of Buddhist statues in Afghanistan ordered by the Taliban.

Significantly, the Prime Minister said in his letter that countries which have influence with the Taliban should be asked to reason with the hardline Kabul leadership to withdraw the decree.

It is well known that Pakistan is a close ally of the Taliban, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the other two countries which recognise the Taliban as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan. The PM has cleverly tried to get Pakistan involved and put the pressure

March 3, 2001

HERITAGE EXPERTS CONDEMN TALIBAN

By Rekha Dixit

MUMBAI : Heritage experts and Islamic leaders in the city have raised their voice against the Taliban's campaign to destroy ancient Buddhist sculptures in Afghanistan.

Condemning the destruction of world heritage sites, they pointed out that if every dominant faith in a country began razing sculptures and structures of other faiths, there would be no ancient relics left on earth.

"Going by the same logic, someone would one day want to demolish the pyramids of Egypt, or just any other structure," said Ishaq Jamkhanwala, president of the Anjuman-i-Islam trust. "The Taliban is living in the Dark Ages and has not understood the teachings of Islam, leave alone learning to respect the religious sentiments of others."

Islamic scholar Rafiq Zakaria told this paper that the Taliban sponsored desecration was a very serious issue as it went against

be preserved for the sake of art alone and not because they are shrines of a particular faith."

Desai pointed out that most of the sculptures being targeted in Afghanistan were from the Gandhara period, dating back to the second and third centuries AD. "They are a fusion of the Graeco-Roman style with the Indian style that developed after cultural interactions between the two civilisations," she said. Heritage activist Cyrus Guzder denounced the Taliban move as a "tragic one which cannot be condoned". He said, "The ancient works of art are not the property of Afghanistan alone, but are part of the world's cultural heritage. Many countries can trace their culture to these relics and to destroy them under some fanatical frenzy is outrageous."

March 3, 2001

PARLIAMENT CONDEMNS ATTACK

NEW DELHI : Both the Houses of Parliament on Friday condemned as "senseless and barbaric" the Taliban attack on Buddhist relics in Bamiyan in Afghanistan. The houses passed identical resolutions and sought United Nations' intervention to put an end to this state of affairs.

measures to get the treasures in India till "sanity is restored" among the present rulers of Afghanistan.

Making a passionate speech on this issue, National Conference member Sharief-ud-din Shariq wondered about the kind of Islam practised by Taliban. Members belonging to all parties participated in the discussion which condemned the acts of vandalism taking place on Buddhist sites in Afghanistan.



March 3, 2001

EDITORIAL

FAITHLESS VANDALISM

Ignoring the protests and outrage voiced by many countries, including Pakistan, the Taliban has announced that demolition of the Buddhist sculptures at Bamiyan and elsewhere in Afghanistan has already begun. The justification for this act of vandalism is the assertion that idols are un-Islamic. The Pakistani newspaper, *Dawn*, has pointed out that these sculptures are not idols, as they are not worshipped. But as far as the Taliban leadership is concerned, such reasoned arguments have fallen on deaf ears. Coming as it does in the wake

The world will now be watching the reactions of other Islamic governments and the Islamic clergy. If they do not come out to condemn this outrage as un-Islamic, and isolate the fanatics acting in the name of Islam, it would serve only to strengthen the dogmatism of all those who subscribe to the "clash of civilisations" formula. In other words, this act of vandalism is likely to be detrimental to the larger interests of the entire Islamic world unless the governments and clergy of those countries speak out strongly against the Taliban. The Taliban has besmirched the name of Islam; all those so-called Jehadi organisations in Pakistan who have links with the Taliban will also come to be associated in public perception with this senseless iconoclasm. It is also a clear warning to the Pakistani leadership and people as to what may happen in their own country if extremist fanatical groups are not vigorously curbed. General Musharraf admits that such fanaticism exists in Pakistan, but contends that it is restricted to a small minority. The danger is that such fanaticism can be infectious, if it is not checked at the very start. It should also be borne in mind that the Taliban was not a native Afghan phenomenon; it was grown and nurtured, and continues to be sustained, in the Deeni madrasas of Pakistan. The stance adopted by Islamabad vis-a-vis the Taliban on this issue will be the litmus test of General

a symbol of personal as well as cultural identity. This gave birth to a religious war or jihad against the Soviets. For the Americans, the mujahideen were not terrorists at that point of time : they were freedom fighters. Communism, nationalism and short-sightedness produced the Taliban.

In India, politics masquerades as religiosity and religion has got politicised. The Taliban and the Sangh Parivar are, at one level, empirical entities. At another level, they are states of mind. Intolerance, destruction, violence and irrationality come as naturally to them as breathing.

For every Mulla Muhammad Omar in Afghanistan, there is a corresponding Giriraj Kishore in India. Similarly, for every felling of the Bamiyan Buddha, there is a parallel in the destruction of the Babri Masjid in India. The Buddha looks on, amused.

It is the politics of 'friend' and 'foe' which has brought this about. And nationalism. Exclusivity, fear of complexity and plurality as well. Why get so hysterical over the destruction of a few statues in Afghanistan? Why not get equally charged by the razing to the ground of the Babri Masjid? Because power is an addiction and can only be attained through dividing people, by shedding blood, by victimising every

Every tyrant, bigot and zealot has a hit-list where culture figures at the very top of this list. For every tyrant carries with him two essential objects : a gun and a pocket calculator. Culture, on the other hand, unsettles.

It holds a normative mirror in front of us. Talibanisation has nothing to do with the form of government prevalent in a country. One look at the Shiv Sena activists on Valentine's Day rubbishes all the virtues attributed to democracy.

The Buddha stands smiling at the spectacle of his statues being bombed. An earnest reporter asks for a sound-bite, that supreme form of reductionism.

The Buddha obliges. He says : "It is by destroying, stilling, stopping, renouncing and abandoning all imaginings, all supposings, all thoughts of 'I am the doer', 'Mine is the doer', all latent 'I am', that a Truth-finder is freed with no residuum for rebirth remaining. You would like to possess something that was permanent, stable, eternal, not liable to change, that would stand fast like unto the eternal. But can you see any such possession? Neither can I."

March 4, 2001

restored Bamiyan Buddhas to the Afghanistan government. He takes pride in the fact that India was among the nine foreign archaeological missions stationed there in the 1960s which earned special appreciation from the then Afghan government for restoring their heritage, particularly the Bamiyan Buddhas.

"The neighbourly bond was cemented further. It boosted prospects for cultural tourism and within a short span of time, money started pouring in from the tourists," says Deshpande. "It was not always work, but sometimes a picnic, too," remembers R. Sengupta, an archaeological expert and head of the ASI restoration mission in Bamiyan. He becomes emotional as he recalls those "beautiful days", the Afghan's hospitality and the wonderful delicacies that he favoured. M.C. Joshi, another former DG of ASI, calls it the "most unfortunate incident" and a blow to UNESCO's theme of "global heritage".

He questions the Taliban's interpretation of Islam, and says the uncultured step by the Taliban is contradictory to the tenets of Islam. "The Taliban militia have totally ignored the fact that even Islamic invaders like Ghazni or Khalzi never touched any monument.

They were only against worshipping, saying it was un-Islamic.

archaeologists were quick to react. Senake Bandarnayake, Sri Lankan High Commissioner in New Delhi and an archaeologist himself, still hoped that the international outcry would yield some fruitful results.

"That would at least help in restoring the finest specimen of man-made artefacts and sculptures for humanity."

March 4, 2001

DALAI LAMA REGRETS DESTRUCTION

I am deeply concerned about the possible destruction of the Bamiyan statues of Buddha at a time when there is closer understanding and better harmony among different religious traditions of the world. Even though the destruction may be for religious reasons, I believe they are of historical importance not only to the people of Afghanistan but to the world at large. Finally, as a Buddhist I feel it is unfortunate that objects of worship are targets of destruction.

March 5, 2001

EDITORIAL

THE BUDDHA SMILES

Divyavadana, Upagupta asks Mara, who has the power of assuming shapes at will, to take the likeness of the Buddha. Upagupta bows in reverence to this figure, which shocks Mara. Upagupta says that he is not worshipping Mara but the person represented by Mara : "Just as people venerating earthen images of the undying angels do not revere the clay as such, but the immortals represented therein." The least that can be said about the events in Afghanistan is that these are the triumph of the slave mentality, the main characteristic of which is the spirit of revenge. The ideal typical slave is incapable of forgetting, unable to love, admire or respect. Such individuals constantly impute wrong to others and perpetually blame the whole world for real and imagined wrongs. They cannot give or create.

In other words, there are Taliban-like organisations, individuals and symptoms within India which are as intolerant and brutal as their counterparts in Afghanistan. The sangh parivar for long has represented and actively promoted this negative strand in Indian society. Acharya Giriraj Kishore's reaction to the happenings in Afghanistan is indicative of the cult of hatred and mindless recriminations that the sangh parivar has promoted. Where were these self-righteous guardians of Indian heritage when the Babri

March 5, 2001

THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY ARE DOING

By Maneesh Pandey

NEW DELHI : History repeats itself. The tradition of *but shikani* (idol or statue breaking) started by Arab marauders, in their quest to rule the Indian subcontinent, is well documented. This was done on the plea that idol or religious object worshipping was un-Islamic. What followed was cultural mayhem — destruction of famous temples and loot of their wealth.

After almost 1,000 years such intolerance has resurfaced. Only the actors have changed. It was the Ghaznis, Ghoris or Khalijis yesterday; today it is the Taliban militia in Afghanistan.

They have justified the destruction of all statues of the Buddha in Afghanistan by claiming that the 'heritage under fire is un-Islamic'. But experts in Islamic studies cast doubt on the Taliban's understanding of Islamic sayings on heritage. Montgomery Watt's *Muhammed at Mecca* and Robinson's *Muhammed* which talk about Islamic ideology in detail show that Islam was, in fact, very conscious

Aurangzeb reiterated the Sh'ariat position on temples, synagogues, churches, etc., that "long standing temples should not be demolished. But no new temples (are) to be built." It further says : "Old places of worship could even be repaired since buildings cannot last forever."

This position of Aurangzeb, known to be a strict Islamist himself, is clearly spelt out in number of *farmans* issued to the Brahmins of Benaras and Vrindavan, said Chandra.

He added : "Mughal period references don't highlight any such destruction of dead monuments. Even Aurangzeb ordered firing of cannon shots at the Bamiyan Buddhas, but he didn't destroy them."

Other references too highlight the same philosophy, "Sikander Lodhi (15th century) tried to destroy some old monuments at Kurukshetra. The Afghan ruler was persuaded not to do so by the Ulemas, saying they're standing there for long. And he accepted the Ulemas' ruling," said Chandra.

The destruction has clearly embarrassed the Islamic world. The Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the highest platform of the Muslim world, urged the Taliban on Saturday to abandon its decision to destroy the country's pre-Islamic statues.

Buddha, is a saddened man. Looking at the 12.4 millimetre piece of coloured paper, he sighs, "I wish they had not destroyed the statue."

A 42-year old philatelist, does not remember how he came to acquire the stamp of the Bamiyan Buddha, issued by the government of Afghanistan in 1985 on the 10th anniversary of the World Tourism Organisation. "It was one of the many stamps I purchased, something I do regularly," he says. The stamp was then priced at 10 Afghanese, "but is priceless today," he says. Did he ever imagine that it would one day be one of the most valued pieces in his collection? "No, never," He says. In fact, he had even forgotten where he had put it.



"When I read the news about the destruction of the statues, I searched for two days for the stamps in India. "With the postal system of Afghanistan being almost non-existent, this stamp is out of circulation there too," he says. "The treasuries where the stamps were kept have also been looted, so this stamp is not available even in Afghanistan," Damodar claims.

Giving the details of the statue and its location, Damodar says the statue belongs to the Lokottara Vadhis sect of Buddhists. "The

The protesters carried boards with slogans like, "Fundamentalism breeds fundamentalism", "Stop destroying historical monuments", "Stop this insanity" and "Down with fundamentalists".

Said media personality Vinod Dua, who was also part of the protest, "It is a condemnable act. I hope perpetrators of the December 6 episode will realise that they were also viewed in the same way as the Talibans are being viewed now." He was obviously referring to the Babri Masjid demolition by *kar sevaks* in Ayodhya eight years ago.

Renowned poet Kaifi Azmi, who was also present, said, "Secularism and tolerance have been shattered by such acts. What Hitler could not do, the Talibans are doing." He added that the streaks of Fascism that exists even in our country, ought to be condemned. Secretary of Indian History Congress, Shireen Moosvi, said, "The new millennium has started with barbarism.

March 6, 2001

FORCES OF DARKNESS FIGHT HISTORY ON THE AFGHAN FRONT

By Farrukh Dhondy

Will the rest of the Muslim world join the protest of civilisation against this vandalism? With the burst of machine guns that powders the rock of the Buddhas, these ugly people will pulverise the image and even the fabric of living Islam. The Taliban, who claim to be scholars of Islam and to be following the dictates of the Koran, are, in one mindless and meaningless gesture, declaring their brand of Islam to be an enemy of history. Their history begins and ends in sixth century Arabia. No good saying to them the world is older than that, my friend.

No good, because theirs is the hardened attitude of a revealed religion and their interpretation of it, which is rejected by other Muslim scholarship and Muslim history, sets Islam against culture. It may be true that Muhammad Ghorī and Muhammad Ghaznavi in their armed forays into India destroyed Hindu temples and slaughtered the aristocracy and priesthood of Hindu society. It may be true that some Muslim monarchs or despots saw it as their religious duty to eradicate idolatry from nations which practised it.

But isn't it different in Afghanistan today? The armies the Taliban are fighting are Muslim. There is no significant population of Buddhists

I can't pretend to begin to know or understand what Koranic sanction these barbarians at the gate think they have for such destruction. It's a question I would dearly like to put to my knowledgeable Muslim friends. Does Islam indeed decree the destruction of all other faiths, or is that belligerence only sanctioned when the Muslims are in power and in the majority? That is a theological question whose answer is important, but of less consequence than asking how a great religion will co-exist with the realities of human history. It is a question that the Muslim world will have to explore and come to terms with in Afghanistan, Iran, Indonesia, where the interaction between Saudi-funded Islam and the continuing pre-Islamic civilisation of the islands has resulted in murderous conflict, and in Egypt, where there are those who would dynamite the pyramids given half a chance. Such barbarism can be kept at bay, contained within its borders with difficulty, suppressed from without but, it can only be fundamentally addressed and challenged from within, Islamic theologians of the world, disunite!

March 8, 2001

THE TALIBAN TERROR — INDIA'S RECORD IS NOT SPOTLESS

Summi Agnivesh and Mahesh Thakur

of idols) can take many forms. Whenever irrational importance is attributed to a material object, no matter what its shape, idolatry results. Idolatry is a sin because it caricatures the nature of God. The idea that God resides only in certain places and that one has to go there (as in the case of shrines, pilgrimages, Haj etc.) to meet him or to secure religious merit, is essentially idolatrous. All religious groups are made to idolise shrines, scriptures, and saints in varying degrees. These become the means by which the priestly class formats the religiosity of their folds.

Genuine religious reform must start within one's own religious home. Idolatry is incompatible with reason and human dignity, being ruthless with idolatry within one's own fold is the best argument against idolatry everywhere else. That was what the genuine reformers of religions tried to do in the past. But in times of spiritual decay, self-criticism becomes an unpardonable sin. Today condemning and coercing everybody else has become the proof of religious virility, and it yields instant profit and popularity.

The current Taliban offensive has two broad features which it shares with all the fundamentalist convulsions in our country. First, it is subjective and selective. It absolutises one's unilateral assumptions

That notwithstanding, it is an entertaining piece of irony that the most vehement condemnation of the Taliban misadventure has come from the sangh parivar quarters. It proves yet again that the bitterest oppositions are between two identical forces. It should not surprise us, then, the protagonists of Ayodhya in December of 1992 see the Taliban project as a 'dastardly deed'. This is one of those unique moments in which the condemnation of others becomes blatant self-condemnation.

In the end, the real issue is neither Ayodhya nor the Bamiyan Buddhas. From a fundamentalist standpoint, both are useful only as tools for whipping up the communal frenzy that is expected to serve at least two purposes. First, it helps to divert the attention of the people from their own burning issues. Ridding the land of some shrines is deemed a more urgent priority than feeding the hungry or clothing the naked. Second, it helps to establish the perverse logic by which people can be degraded into tools to serve the hidden agenda of their pseudo-religious ventriloquists. Though this is a frontal insult to human dignity and integrity, fundamentalist projects succeed in retaining the blind loyalty of the masses for a period of time. This is achieved mainly by playing up the popular craving for aggression

retaliation to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992" is a clever after-thought, calculated to embarrass the Vajpayee government in the eyes of the world. Mr. Vajpayee is theoretically right in denouncing the Taliban move as "a further obscurantist regression — an assault on centuries of Afghan tradition". But he has to secure the moral right to be so indignant. As long as his party continues to whitewash the black deed that tarnished India's global image, we cannot hope to be taken seriously in our protestation against the Taliban's actions.

Of course, all civilised people must decry and discredit the Taliban syndrome beyond our borders. It is a phenomenon programmed for destruction and endemic under-development. But the logic of fundamentalism dictates that its followers at home will be at the fore-front of this ritual for whatever political mileage they may derive from it. But those who remember the first 15 pages of Veer Savarkar's book, *Hindutva*, do not need to be persuaded that it was not only in Afghanistan that the Buddha and his followers were administered a raw deal.



BAMIYAN BUDDHAS

